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Minds and Hearts (1) Despite questions of the motivation behind them, the attacks by the President and the Vice President on the moral content of television entertainment have found an echo in the chambers of the American soul. Many who reject the \_\_\_\_\_ still accept the message. They do not like the moral tone of American TV. In our society only the human family surpasses television in its capacity to communicate values, provide role models, form con-sciences and motivate human behavior. Few educators, church leaders or politicians possess the moral influence of those who create the nation ' s entertainment. (2) Every good story will not only captivate its viewers but also give them some insight into what it means to be a human being. By so doing, it can help them grow into the deeply centered, sovereignty free, joyously lov-ing human beings God made them to be. Meaning, freedom and love the supreme human values. And this is the kind of human enrichment the American viewing public has a right to expect from those who make its en-tertainment. (3) It is not a question of entertainment or enrichment. These are complementary concerns and presuppose each other. The story that entertains without enriching is superficial and escapist. The story that enriches with-out entertaining is simply dull. The story that does both is a delight. (4) Is that what the American viewing public is getting? Perhaps 10% of prime-time

network programming is a happy combination of entertainment and enrichment. I think immediately of dramas like *I ' ll Fly Away* and *Life Goes On* or comedies like *Brooklyn Bridge* and *The Wonder Years*. There used to be television movies rich in human values, but they have now become an endangered species. Sleaze and mayhem. Murder off the front page. The woman in jeopardy. Is there too much sex on American TV? Not necessarily. Sex is a beautiful, even holy, part of human life, a unique way for husband and wife to express their love. No doubt there is too much dishonest sex on TV. How often do we see the aching emptiness, the joyless despair that so often follows sex without commitment? And certainly there is too much violence. It desensitizes its viewers to the horrors of actual violence and implies that it is an effective way to resolve conflict. I seldom see the dehumanization that violence produces, not only in its victims, but also in its criminals. And I never see the nonviolent alternative the way of dialogue and love explored. Jesus has much to teach us here. So do Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Ninety-four percent of the American people believe in God. 41% go to church on any given Sunday. But you ' d never know it by watching American TV. We seldom see TV characters reach for God or fight with Him, despite the theatricality latent in their doing so. Why is that? I find television too much concerned with what people have and too little concerned with who they are, very concerned with taking care of No. 1 and not at all concerned with sharing themselves with other people. All too often it tells us the half truth we want to hear rather than the whole truth we need to hear. (5) Why is television not more fully

realizing its \_\_\_\_\_ potential? Is the creative community at fault? Par-tially. But not primarily. I have lived and worked in that community for 32 years, as both priest and producer. As a group, these people are not the sex-crazed egomaniacs of popular legend. Most of them love their spouses, dote on their children and hunger after God. They have values. In fact, in Hollywood in recent months, audi-ence enrichment has become the in thing. ABC, CBS and NBC have all held workshops on it for their pro-gramming executives. A coalition of media companies has endowed the Humanitas Prize so that it can recog-nize and celebrate those who accomplish it. And during the school year, an average of 50 writers spend a Satur-day a month in a church basement discussing the best way to accomplish it. All before the Vice President ' s mis-guided lambasting of Murphy Brown. (6) The problem with American TV is not the lack of storytellers of conscience but the commercial system within which they have to operate. Television in the U.S. is a business. In the past, the business side has been balanced by a commitment to public service. But in recent years the fragmentation of the mass audience, huge interest payments and skyrocketing production costs have combined with the FCC ' s resignation of its responsi-bility to protect the common good to produce an almost total preoccupation with the bottom line. The networks are struggling to survive. And like most business in that situation, they make only what they feel the public will buy. And that, the statistics seem to indicate, is mindless, heartless, escapist fare. If we are dissatisfied with the moral content of what we are invited to watch, I think we should begin by examining

our own consciences. When we tune in, are we ready to plunge into reality, so as to extract its meaning, or are we hoping to escape into a sedated world of illusion? And if church leaders want to elevate the quality of the country ' s entertainment, they should forget about boycotts, production codes and censorship. They should work at educating their peo-ple in media literacy and at mobilizing them to support quality shows in huge numbers. (7) That is the only sure way to improve the moral content of America ' s entertainment. 100Test  
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